



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT AND TEACHER QUALITY PROGRAMS

Dr. Rick Melmer
Cabinet Secretary
South Dakota Department of Education
and Cultural Affairs
700 Governors Drive
Pierre, SD 57501-2291

Dear Secretary Melmer:

On November 8-10, 2004, the Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs office of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education conducted a program review in South Dakota. The program office team reviewed your State's progress in meeting the highly qualified teacher provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, and your State's administration of the Title II, Part A Improving Teacher Quality State Grants program.

I am enclosing with this letter a monitoring report that is based on information we collected during the review as well as on documentation submitted by your office about your "high objective uniform State standard of evaluation" (HOUSSE) procedures. We would like to take this opportunity to inform you that the Department agrees that your HOUSSE procedures for evaluating the content knowledge of veteran elementary school teachers satisfy the requirements of the statute. I am also pleased to note that, in general, the Department of Education team was impressed with your use of ESEA Title II program funds to promote high-quality professional development and with several of the planning tools developed by the South Dakota Department of Education for its districts. You should also know that South Dakota was one of the early States we selected to monitor, and the feedback we received from your staff on ways to improve the monitoring protocol was incorporated into subsequent State reviews.

As you will see from the enclosed report, the Department has identified several areas in which further action by the South Dakota Department of Education is required. Most importantly, the Department is concerned that South Dakota has not yet put in place a rigorous test to determine the subject-knowledge competency of new elementary school teachers, particularly those who were hired to teach in Title I programs between 2002-03 and this current school year.

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Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation.

If there are any factual inaccuracies in the report, we would appreciate receiving suggested corrections no later than April 22, so that we can appropriately incorporate them into the final version of the report. For areas in which the Department has recommended further actions or required corrective actions, we would appreciate a written response to each issue by May 20, 2005.

Again, thank you for hosting a well-organized and productive monitoring visit. We are looking forward to working further with you and your staff in any follow-up activities, and in assisting you in any way to ensure that all teachers are meeting the highly qualified requirements and to help improve the delivery of ESEA Title II, Part A services in South Dakota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Robert M. Stonehill". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Robert M. Stonehill, Ph.D.
Deputy Director

Enclosure